



Satellite image showing parade of storms across the Atlantic on August 30, 1995, during the height of exceptionally active Atlantic hurricane season. Red colors denote cold temperatures associated with deep high clouds, such as tropical storms, and purple denotes, warm temperatures of low clouds or the Earth's surface. (Data from the GOES Imager instrument on the GOES-8 satellite; visualization by Hal Pierce.)

that Atlantic hurricanes may in part maintain the poleward flow of warm water. The thermohaline circulation helps regulate the Earth's climate, and the historical record suggests that the current operates in an unsteady manner. Sudden changes in the 'speed' of the thermohaline circulation may hasten abrupt shifts in climate. It is hypothesized, for instance, that an increase in Atlantic tropical cyclones will accelerate the thermohaline circulation, effectively cooling the tropics and warming the higher latitudes.

Perhaps the final question to ask is this: "What effect will global warming have on hurricanes?" There is evidence to suggest that the atmosphere has slowly warmed by a small amount over the past century. But the historical record of hurricane activity (beginning in 1944) is clear: There has been no demonstrable increase in either frequency or intensity of hurricanes that can be linked to a global warming trend. If the oceans warm, one would pre-